

NEW MEDICARE DRUG PROGRAM

BY PAMELA CUNNINGHAM, SAGE PLUS PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Attention physicians:

Patients with Medicare coverage may ask you about the upcoming drug benefit program. You and your patient can contact Sage PLUS at 586-7299 or 1-888-875-9229 for information. The following provides additional background and resource information.

Mailings were sent to beneficiaries from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and the Social Security Administration (SSA). They address two very important audiences with information about their drug coverage.

Between May 27 and June 20, CMS mailed out notifications to "deemed" beneficiaries...those who are full-benefit dual eligibles, those with SSI, and those who are enrolled in Medicare Savings Programs (MSPs). These beneficiaries will receive notices telling them that, beginning January 1, 2006, they will start receiving their prescription drug coverage from Medicare. The notice will let them know that they have been automatically deemed eligible for extra assistance and enrollment in Medicare Prescription Drug Plans (PDPs). They'll be instructed when and where to look for further information. If you'd like to look at the actual notices, go to this link, <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/medicarereform/lir.asp>.

Starting on May 27, and going on throughout the summer, SSA is notifying beneficiaries with limited income and means, who may be eligible for special assistance in paying for their drugs. Unlike the group covered by the CMS notification, this group of beneficiaries needs to apply for the subsidy. SSA's mailing consists of a cover letter, instructions and an application. Over 99,000 of these applications will be sent to households in Hawaii, with mailing cycles tied to the terminal four digits of the beneficiaries' social security numbers. The mailings will encourage beneficiaries to fill out and return the applications to see if they qualify for the subsidy. To see the text of the mailing, go to this link, <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/organizations/medicareoutreach2> and scroll down to Sample: Application for Help with Medicare Prescription Drug Plan Costs.

If you receive any inquiries from beneficiaries regarding these mailings, you should 1) identify, if you can, the source of the mailing (CMS or SSA) and 2) direct the beneficiary to the appropriate agency's information number... 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) for CMS and 1-800-772-1213 for SSA.

If you need further information or clarification about these mailings, please do not hesitate to contact us, Sage PLUS at 586-7299 or 1-888-875-9229.

Editor's Note:

If you are not familiar with Sage PLUS or have any questions about the above, contact them at the Executive Office on Aging. Sage PLUS is the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (known nationwide as a "SHIP"). It is a federal grantee from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and has been administered by the State of Hawaii, Department of Health's Executive Office on Aging for the past 12 years.

Their mission is to provide accurate and current information regarding benefits to Medicare and Medicaid recipients, their families, and caregivers. They also provide one on one assistance through their network of volunteers Statewide. The volunteers assist with writing appeals, and "shoebox" cases. They also do presentations to the community about Medicare, Medicaid, Long Term Care Financing and other aspects of health insurance.

With the signing of the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003, the SHIP (Sage PLUS) has the task of educating the community about the new benefits including Part D (prescription drug benefit). Since many seniors will be asking their physicians about the program, we want to get this information out to our readers.

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